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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCHES

SIR,—Many people are much interested in and view with satisfaction the frank and open discussion in some of our periodicals of the question of the status of the Christian Church, so-called, and its creeds.

There is great confusion in the popular mind, and even in the minds of thinking people, of the terms *Church*, *Christianity*, and *Religion*; and, if we wish to go deeper into the matter, which we must of necessity do—for any discussion of creeds leads us inevitably to it—we must consider the *philosophic basis of Theism*.

We have recently been honored by the visit of that distinguished English gentleman, Mr. Arthur Balfour, philosopher and statesman, who through theism, finds support for his belief in Christianity, as do most of the great minds of the thinking world who continue in the Church to-day. They are content to allow the ignorant and unthinking to be controlled and live by the symbolisms, superstitions, and fears by means of which priest and Bible hold the great masses to the Church; aids to government and a help in ordering society. For themselves they justify the Church by finding a philosophic basis for their belief in Theism. But in spite of the dominant theistic philosophy which justifies the Church to-day, if not its creeds, like a thin pure thread of gold through English thought has run the religion of its clearest minds; and they have lived or died by their reasonableness and clarity of intellect quite apart from the Church; quite apart from Christianity except as it held some kernel of universal truth within the scope of the human mind.

It seemed to me, in reading Dr. McConnell's article in *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* and later the discussion of it, that he was conscious of the two elements in the Church and was seeking to justify both: to find an honest place for both in its fold. But, to the man who sees most clearly, to Truth in its highest form the word compromise is unknown; and so to many of us the thinking man who compromises with the church through Theism lacks courage and falls just short of Heaven. He is unwilling to recognize his human limitations.

To be very concrete, I recall a pleading, ignorant priest of the Protestant Episcopal Faith using his very last argument to keep in the church one who was breaking away, and the reply of a fearless, clear-sighted woman. "Do you not believe that God is love?" said he in his irritation. "I am prepared," said she, "to assign *no* attributes to Deity: to that something of energy which we perceive working in the universe."

There was nothing more to be said. She had touched bottom. Can philosophy to-day justify the assumption of attributes to Deity? Upon this rests the whole structure of Christianity, creeds and all. In the pure atmosphere of higher thought for fifty years a titanic battle has been waging. Some of the best of our periodicals have admitted more or less of the controversy which in various ways is filtering down through to the masses.

There is a vast field for popular education and clarification of thought in this great period of expansion along these lines. The popular mind is grasping slowly the teaching of the last fifty years: of science; of the higher criticism; of archaeology; of psychology—and it is stooping to weather the gale of that temporary phase of the world's history, industrialism. But above and outside industrialism as much as above feudalism or any other phase of civil history hangs that transcendent truth: from simple to complex and from complex back to simple—as true of the rhythms of human society as it is of world building and disintegration under the great rhythms of the universe. Christianity, so-called, as expressed in various organized Christian churches with their creeds is a phase of civil and social history.

You may be interested in a little experiment in popular education which came to a head in a small way in this remote section of the country some three years ago. It is in part an effort to combat the insidious and insistent proselytism of Christian sects in the public schools and the County Agricultural Associations. It is the evangelical churches in particular that have attempted to attach themselves as a rider to agricultural rehabilitation in our country districts. The Young Men's Christian Association, backed by what funds is not always certain, is one of the most potent forces of intemperate and insidious proselytism to the evangelical forms.

Hector Macpherson is an author almost unknown in this country, a personal friend and biographer of Herbert Spencer, and yet he finds in philosophy, through Theism, bases for the belief in the Calvinistic idea of God. He plays easily over the whole field of philosophy and frankly admits that the whole evangelical world is without a creed to-day; but he naively adds in substance: nothing but a creed as stiff as the creed of Calvin ever could have driven the Jesuit out of Scotland. If we are to-day, as we must admit we are, without a creed, let us set about making a creed that will arm us effectively against our religious enemies.

And so the merry war, the strife and bloodshed, goes on in the little triangle of Anglican, Evangelical and Roman Catholic, and we must include Greek Catholic too, all termed Christian, with the armed Mohammedan on their frontier. To it is largely due the Irish question, the Mexican difficulties, if not the great war abroad.

The destruction of Rheims was prophetic. In the high lights it would seem as though creeds and our churches, examined as social and economic institutions, were an anomaly, and that religion so soon as it is organized by human hands, ceases to be religion. It fails to rise above the tide of our social and economic life.

But with all due deference to Dr. McConnell, whatever may be true of sects and creeds, there is no such thing as compromise in religion. Either a man is or he isn't.

CLAREMONT, N. H.

ELLEN P. SANDERS.

DO WE NEED A NEW LUTHER?

SIR,—The article contributed to a recent *REVIEW* by S. D. McConnell, D.D., entitled, "What Are the Churches to Do?" and subsequent comments thereon in following numbers, suggest the pressing need of reform in the twentieth century Church. It is also devoutly to be wished that the churches would give careful attention to what is being said along this line by men of keen perception and independent thought.

It is, however, too often the case that he who points out the means of avoiding in the future the costly mistakes of the past is denounced as an iconoclast—an enemy of the Church.

The Pagan, the Mohammedan, the Christian and the Jew represent the grand divisions of the modern religious world. These are each and all rent, sundered